

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION

Amend the paragraph beginning at page 11, line 21 as follows:

Referring now to Fig. 3, a block representation is shown of mail item file ~~300-200~~ that is created and supplemented as mail item 14 is processed and delivered to recipient 30. Mail item file ~~300-200~~ includes: a header 305 of postal information that has been captured from an initial read of the DPM; a mail item identification number 310, which has been read from the DPM or assigned within the postal distribution network 100; a list 318 of special services requested; and one or more e-mail addresses ~~320~~315. For example, the special services may direct a communication to the mailer, the recipient, a third party repository or any other party. The present invention provides for one or more of such communications. Mail item file ~~300-200~~ further includes various data elements 320 that are optionally captured depending on the special services requested. Data elements 320 may include induction time 330 and induction address 332 indicating when and where mail item 14 enters the postal distribution network 100, intermediate times 340 and addresses 342 indicating various stages of processing within the postal distribution network 100, and delivery time 350 and delivery address 352 indicating when and where the mail item leaves the postal distribution network 100. Data elements 320 may further include information captured when the DPM 12 was read, such as a hash 360 of the contents of mail item 14 and a digital signature and/or certificate 370.

Amend the paragraph beginning at page 13, line 20 as follows:

Referring now to Figs. 6A and 6B, there is shown a flow chart of the processing of mail item 14 by postal distribution network 100. At step 500, the processing of mail item 14 begins with the scanning of DPM 12, which provides delivery information and special services information including mailer's e-mail address. A mail piece image may also be obtained at step 500, or the image may be

scanned in upon delivery. At step 505, a verification key is obtained from DPM 12 or an external database, and the CPVC is verified using digital signature with appendix, digital signature with message recovery, a hybrid digital signature or message authentication code or postage validation code. At step 510, if the CPVC is not correct, then at step 590, mail item 14 is outsorted. If the CPVC is correct, then a check is made at step 515 to determine whether confirmation of special services has been requested. If not, then normal processing continues at step 580. If confirmation of special services has been requested, then at step 520, mail item 14 is marked for special handling by the delivery mail carrier, and mail item 14 is sorted and transported for final sort and delivery. At step 525, when mail item 14 is delivered into a mailbox or handed to the recipient, the delivery mail carrier scans DPM 12 to obtain the confirmation notification address. Alternatively, or additionally, the recipient may scan DPM 12 to obtain the confirmation notification address for sending the notification or an additional related message. The method flow proceeds from step 5205 to step 530 where an image of the mail piece is scanned, if the image was not scanned at step 500. The image may include either the entire mail item contents or only the mail piece envelope. At step 540, the recipient is queried as to whether or not the recipient desires to provide a response to the originator of the mail piece. If the answer to the query at step 540 is "no", then at step 550, the response and mail piece image are combined into a message, the method continues to step 600 as described herein below.